

Shame, Pride and Prejudice: Jane Austen's Psychological Sophistication

Gordon Hirsch

Elizabeth Bennet's great moment of psychological insight in *Pride and Prejudice* comes soon after she reads Darcy's letter:

She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried. "I who have prided myself on my discernment. . . . How humiliating is this discovery!—Yet, how just a humiliation!—Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one [Wickham], and offended by the neglect of the other [Darcy], on the very beginning of our acquaintance I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself." (176-77; 2:13)¹

Elizabeth's "prepossession" in favor of Wickham and against Darcy—her "prejudice," in other words—stems from her feeling slighted by Darcy, from her wounded "pride," from her sense of vulnerability. Her confidence, her "pride" in her own discernment, has collapsed, and she now reports feeling ridiculous, humiliated, ashamed. In this way Jane Austen not only underlines the themes alluded to in her novel's title but also highlights their connection. Elizabeth's "pride" has driven her to be defensively "prejudiced." Although she once took satisfaction from her pride, it is now seen to be a response to threats to her self-esteem, a defense against feelings of inferiority, vulnerability and shame. Elizabeth understands her prejudice to be a product of her vulnerable pride, and beneath that pride—ready to return with a vengeance—is the feeling of shame.

With the notable exceptions of D. W. Harding and Bernard Paris,

most critics of Jane Austen have not focused on the emotional content and concern with affect in her novels, preferring to concentrate either on her technical manipulations of tone and structure or on her moral thematics. This is particularly true of *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel which Austen herself referred to as possibly “rather too light, and bright, and sparkling” (*Letters* 299). Given that concern with appearing ridiculous is a major issue in the novel, however, the very nature of Austen’s disclaimer invites one to look beneath the sprightliness of the performance. In doing so, one discerns not only the psychological acuity of her insights into the emotional dynamics of shame but also her sociological perceptiveness about the way a culture reinforces feelings of shame as a means of maintaining its hierarchies and control.

An instructive way to begin such a discussion is to note that about a century before Austen wrote her novel, David Hume had also investigated the relation between pride and shame, and stressed the importance of these two “passions” in the psyche in his *Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume identified pride and humility as two fundamental, opposed feelings about the self—the first pleasant and the second painful. For Hume, as for Austen, pride is “not always vicious, nor [humility] virtuous” (297-98). Pride and humility are above all connected with “our idea of ourself” (277), though that idea is affected by the way others regard us; these emotions are, then, important regulators of human behavior in society. Like Austen, Hume was interested as well in the curious way pride attaches not only to our personal qualities but also to our family—“their riches and credit”—and to “any inanimate object which bears a relation to us”—a house, garden, region, or nation (307-08). Austen’s study of pride and shame is, however, considerably more concrete and detailed than Hume’s philosophical formulations, and the psychological issues she dramatizes are further illuminated by bringing the insights of modern psychology to bear.

The “Shame Experience,” as Susan Miller calls it, or “Facing Shame,” as Merle A. Fossum and Marilyn J. Mason entitle their book,

is one of the subjects most intensively studied in recent years by psychoanalysts and psychodynamically oriented clinicians. Although such research includes a broad range of ideas, these studies have in common a particular emphasis on affect or felt emotions, and a view of shame as especially important and problematic in the development of identity, the sense of self. "Shame" is seen as encompassing a complex of associated affective and cognitive states, which include feeling ashamed, embarrassed, ridiculous, humiliated, dishonored, worthless, etc. Each term denotes a similar painful feeling about the self, though each suggests its own particular admixture of guilt, self-directed humility, and other, related feelings.

One prominent clinician, Helen Block Lewis, offers this general description of the phenomenology of shame: "In shame, hostility against the self is experienced in the passive mode. The self feels not in control but overwhelmed and paralyzed by the hostility directed against it. One could 'crawl through a hole' or 'sink through the floor' or 'die' with shame. The self feels small, helpless, and childish" ("Shame" 19). Shame is a feeling of disgust, displeasure or embarrassment about some quality of the self, occurring typically at a moment of uncovering and exposure. It is connected with feelings of low self-esteem, and in some cases it may produce depression. Pride, identified with positive feelings about the self, is at the opposite pole of what the psychiatrist Donald Nathanson terms "the shame/pride axis." As is often the case in psychology, however, opposition at the poles may be more apparent than real. Frequently individuals attempt to master their shame through the development of an illusory, brittle pride. Shame is thus a "master emotion," one which is likely to trigger other affects and behaviors (such as rage or grandiosity) in response to deeply rooted feelings of personal inadequacy and inferiority. One reason for the importance of studies of shame in contemporary psychological research is the emphasis on observed, primary affect, and on a response to this affect which is also frequently evident on an emotional level, without an inordinate reliance on abstract psychological metatheory. These new,

affect-based studies can be particularly useful in analyzing a novel like *Pride and Prejudice*, which seems to take feelings of pride and shame as its core psychological focus.

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The heroine of Austen's novel, Elizabeth Bennet, appears at first glance to be witty, able and self-possessed; one recognizes, with Caroline Bingley, that "in her air altogether, there is a self-sufficiency" (226; 3:3). Nevertheless the basic situation of the novel explores Elizabeth's recurrent feelings of shame about her family, and the book tends to move from one shame-laden situation to another. Darcy's first proposal of marriage to Elizabeth and his letter of explanation after Elizabeth has rejected his proposal underline the importance of shame in the book. Even as Darcy proposes, "his sense of her inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination were dwelt on" (161; 2:11). Elizabeth's mother, in particular, is only the daughter of a small-town attorney, a station in life taken up by her brother-in-law, while her brother (Elizabeth's uncle) is, unfortunately, from the point of view of Darcy and his class, a London businessman who actually lives "within view of his own warehouses" (120; 2:2). "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?" Darcy pointedly asks (164; 2:11). Still worse than the "situation of your mother's family," Darcy notes, is "that total want of propriety so frequently, so almost uniformly betrayed by herself [Elizabeth's mother], by your younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father" (168; 2:12). Although Elizabeth begins Darcy's letter as a resisting reader, she grows increasingly distressed by what she feels to be the accuracy of his charges:

The compliment to herself and her sister [Jane] was not unfelt. It soothed, but it could not console her for the contempt which had been thus self-attracted by the rest of her family; and as she considered that Jane's disap-

pointment had in fact been the work of her nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit of both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct, she felt depressed beyond anything she had ever known before. (177; 2:13)

In her own past behaviour, there was a constant source of vexation and regret; and in the unhappy defects of her family a subject of yet heavier chagrin. They were hopeless of remedy. (180; 2:24)

If the climax of the second volume, coming just at the midpoint of the novel, consists of Elizabeth's unflattering recognition of her vulnerability to shame and her understanding of what has motivated her behavior toward Darcy, the climactic chapter of the first volume, the description of the Netherfield ball, is a lengthy account of the way Elizabeth is racked by shame and embarrassment occasioned by one incident after another.

Elizabeth's two first "dances of mortification" with Mr. Collins, her clerical cousin, supply her with "all the shame and misery which a disagreeable partner for a couple of dances can give. The moment of her release from him was ecstasy" (78-79; 1:18). Next, Elizabeth dances with Darcy; they spar inconclusively on various topics, and end their dance in frosty taciturnity. Caroline Bingley then denounces Wickham to Elizabeth on the grounds that, "considering his descent, one could not expect much better" than "infamous" behavior from him (83; 1:18), an attack that particularly enrages Elizabeth because the Bennets' own rank in society is an issue. Collins again embarrasses Elizabeth by indecorously approaching and introducing himself to Darcy, who is vastly his social superior, justifying this breach of decorum to Elizabeth on the grounds that "I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom" (85; 1:18). Mary Bennet, "after very little entreaty . . . oblige[s] the company" with a song, followed by an encore, though it is obvious to all that "her voice was weak and her manner affected" (88; 1:18). Elizabeth's mother

loudly proclaims her hopes that Jane will marry Bingley, as well as her indifference to Darcy's opinions. Through all of this, "Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation," and "was in agonies"; indeed, "to Elizabeth it appeared that had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit or finer success" (87, 88, 89; 1:18).

Reaching momentary peaks at the Netherfield ball and at the time she receives Darcy's letter, shame is the main affectual motif associated with Elizabeth throughout the novel. Sometimes she herself feels ashamed, worthless, humiliated; at other times, characters attempt to shame her. Whether they succeed or not depends on such things as the accuracy of their charges and the degree of her attachment to the shamer. Caroline Bingley, Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine de Bourgh are largely ineffectual in their attempts to play upon her shame; Darcy's criticisms are, in the long run, less easily dismissed. Elizabeth's characteristic response to feelings of shame is caustic wit. She defends against feelings of worthlessness and self-hate by attempting to gain the upper hand through witty and aggressive repartee.

This strategy is evident as early as the novel's third chapter, when Elizabeth overhears Darcy's remark at a ball that "she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*" (12; 1:3). Her effort to turn the tables and triumph over Darcy when recalling this incident is characteristic: "Elizabeth remained with no very cordial feelings toward [Darcy]. She told the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous" (12; 1:3). Much later she recognizes the defensive and self-aggrandizing quality of her wit: "I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to [Darcy], without any reason" (190; 2:17).

Elizabeth grows increasingly angry and distraught as she learns of Darcy's efforts to dissuade Bingley from calling on Jane in London, which she attributes chiefly to Darcy's sense of the Bennets' "want of

importance”: “The agitation and tears which the subject occasioned brought on a headache; and it grew so much worse towards the evening that added to her unwillingness to see Mr. Darcy, it determined her not to attend her cousins to Rosings” for tea (159; 2:10). When Darcy, to her amazement, calls on her instead at the parsonage later that evening to propose marriage in a manner which she finds wounding, Elizabeth responds with a reactive humiliated fury, with what psychologists today would call “shame-rage” (Lewis, “Shame” 19): “She lost all compassion in anger. . . . ‘If I could *feel* gratitude, I would now thank you. But I cannot. . . . The feelings which, you tell me, have long prevented the acknowledgment of your regard can have little difficulty in overcoming it after this explanation” (161-62; 2:11). Darcy is able immediately to grasp some of what underlies Elizabeth’s response: “[My] offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design” (163-64; 2:11). But Darcy’s explanatory letter is required before Elizabeth can examine critically the origins of her own feelings.

Despite Elizabeth’s conscious recognition, while reading Darcy’s letter, of the role her vulnerable self-image played in the development of her “prejudice,” her sister Lydia’s later “infamy” in running off with Wickham reactivates her sense of shame, producing sleepless nights (250; 3:6). She sees Lydia’s action as “such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace” as certainly to foreclose any possible renewal of Darcy’s proposal (232; 3:4): “From such a connection she could not wonder that he should shrink. The wish of procuring her regard, which she had assured herself of his feeling in Derbyshire, could not in rational expectation survive such a blow as this. She was humbled, she was grieved; she repented, though she hardly knew of what. She became jealous of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefitted by it” (260-61; 3:8).

Lydia returns unashamed to her father’s house after her marriage to Wickham (which has secretly been arranged by Darcy to preserve the

honor of the Bennets), and Elizabeth is “disgusted” by “the easy assurance of the young couple. . . . Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless. . . . It was not to be supposed that time would give Lydia that embarrassment from which she had been so wholly free at first” (264-64; 3:9). Lydia has essentially followed in Elizabeth’s footsteps: she has been attracted to and conned by Wickham. Worst of all, she is not even ashamed of acting on her wishes and running away with him! Lydia’s impulsive behavior and lack of shame represent precisely what Elizabeth fears and represses in herself. Elizabeth is furious, too, that her mother is “more alive to the disgrace which the want of new clothes must reflect on her daughter’s nuptials, than to any sense of shame at her eloping and living with Wickham a fortnight before they took place” (260; 3:8). When Darcy and Bingley revisit Longbourn, Elizabeth’s “shame,” “misery” and “wretchedness” all return as she listens to her mother brag about Lydia’s marriage and single Bingley out for her attention while ignoring Darcy (282-83; 3:11).

At this critical moment of renewed low self-esteem, Lady Catherine de Bourgh reenters the novel and attempts to shame Elizabeth into promising not to marry Darcy. Lady Catherine’s intervention backfires, of course, and this is certainly one example of the considerable strength and resiliency in the face of blatant and overt attempts to shame her which are also part of Elizabeth’s character. She is restored to happiness when Darcy revives his marriage proposal, but at the end of the novel considerable attention is devoted to the continuing embarrassments of the courtship phase at home and to the question of who will and who will not be welcome at Elizabeth’s new abode on Darcy’s estate:

The Collinses were come themselves to Lucas Lodge. . . . The arrival of her friend was a sincere pleasure to Elizabeth, though in the course of their meetings she must sometimes think the pleasure dearly bought, when she saw Mr. Darcy exposed to all the parading and obsequious humility of her husband. . . .

Mrs. Philips's vulgarity was another, and perhaps a greater tax on his forbearance; and though Mrs. Philips, as well as her sister, stood in too much awe of him to speak with the familiarity which Bingley's good humour encouraged, yet, whenever she *did* speak, she must be vulgar. . . . Elizabeth did all she could to shield him from the frequent notice of either, and was ever anxious to keep him to herself, and to those of her family with whom he might converse with mortification; and though the uncomfortable feelings arising from all this took from the season of courtship much of its pleasure, it added to the hope of the future; and she looked forward with delight to the time when they should be removed from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley. (322-23; 3:18)

Of all the members of her family, the ones most truly welcome at Pemberley will be her uncle and aunt Gardiner, about whom Elizabeth had earlier said, "It was consoling that [Darcy] should know she had some relations for whom there was no need to blush" (213; 3:1). Throughout the novel, then, the family of emotions associated with shame—and Elizabeth's efforts to cope with these feelings by means of hostility or wit—constitute Elizabeth's leitmotif.

In fact, not only Elizabeth but one character after another, whether major or minor, is connected with feelings of shame, or attempts to shame another character, or related issues of self-esteem. Sir William Lucas, Charlotte's father, knighted during his mayoralty, takes "a disgust to his business and his residence in a small market town" and quits them both in favor of a more genteel existence in "Lucas Lodge" (17; 1:5). Caroline Bingley repeatedly tries to shame Darcy into giving up his interest in Elizabeth by calling attention to the woman who would become "your mother-in-law" should he win her (46; 1:10), or by remarking on Elizabeth's dirty stockings and petticoat "six inches deep in mud"—"such an exhibition"—when Elizabeth arrives at Netherfield after walking in the rain (32; 1:8). Mr. Collins's "mixture of servility and self-importance" (56; 1:13) expresses perfectly Austen's in-

sight that grandiose fantasies and aggressive self-promotion may be a defense against threatened self-esteem. Intuitively knowledgeable about such matters himself, Collins pitches his proposal of marriage to Elizabeth in such a manner as to play upon her susceptibility to shame: “You may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips [about your want of fortune] when we are married” (93; 1:19) or, when his rejection appears likely, he warns Elizabeth that “it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you” (95; 1:19). Wounded by Elizabeth’s rejection, Collins, in a “state of angry pride” (100; 1:21), seeks revenge by rapidly turning his attention to Charlotte Lucas. Wickham, a confidence man usually able to defend against feeling by a display of “manners,” nevertheless registers shame when he unexpectedly encounters Darcy in Meryton: “Both changed colour, one looked white, the other red” (63; 1:15). Lady Catherine de Bourgh tries to shame Elizabeth during the latter’s visit to Rosings by expressing amazement that the Bennet daughters have had no governess and that all are “out” in society at once (142; 2:6). In her later, last-ditch effort to separate Elizabeth and Darcy, she castigates the “upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune” (299; 3:14).

In particular Austen explores the role of shame in the makeup of four of the novel’s more important characters—Charlotte Lucas, Mr. Bennet, Jane Bennet and Darcy. Elizabeth’s relations with the first of these frequently touch on the expression of affect in this sense. Charlotte apparently feels less emotion but is readier to display her desire than Elizabeth. Though Elizabeth can scarcely believe her friend is serious about such tactics, Charlotte insists that “a woman had better show *more* affection than she feels” for a man, lest “she lose the opportunity of fixing him” (20; 1:6). When Charlotte acts on her beliefs and “fixes” the ridiculous Collins, Elizabeth sees Charlotte as “disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem”—“a most humiliating picture” (110; 1:22). Throughout her visit to Charlotte’s new home at Collins’s parsonage, Elizabeth studies Charlotte for signs of shame and embar-

rassment: “When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not seldom, she involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear. . . . When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte’s evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten” (134-35; 2:5). If “in general Charlotte wisely did not hear” what Collins says, the implication is that she does in fact “hear” it but chooses wisely to *ignore* it. The “faint blush” alone betrays her shame. Generally, Charlotte seems able to will to “forget” Collins altogether—at least so “Elizabeth supposed.”

One of the problems readers experience in evaluating Elizabeth’s visit with the Collinses is that nearly every perception of their marriage is filtered through Elizabeth’s judgmental eyes, so that it is difficult to discern how critical Austen herself is of this marriage. Charlotte has, after all, attained the establishment she sought, however inadequate Collins may be as a spouse from Elizabeth’s point of view. In fact, Elizabeth can scarcely see Charlotte as a person distinct from herself, with different needs and values. Elizabeth’s parting thoughts about the couple suggest that the truth may be a bit more complicated than it had seemed at first: “Poor Charlotte!—it was melancholy to leave her to such society! But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion” (183; 2:15). Charlotte, in other words, may be at least a little less susceptible to feelings of shame, or perhaps a bit less threatened by them, than Elizabeth. Although alternative explanations are, of course, possible—for example, that Charlotte gives no indication of seeking compassion precisely *because* she feels ashamed—it still remains clear that Charlotte has made her choice with a pretty good sense of the sort of person Collins is, and that Elizabeth would find such a choice more objectionable, and perhaps more threatening to her self-image, than Charlotte does.

Elizabeth’s father is also defined largely in relation to shame, be-

cause he both humiliates his wife and fails to keep his younger daughters under sufficient control so as not to bring disgrace upon the whole family. “Captivated by youth and beauty,” he has weakly married the ignorant and foolish Mrs. Bennet, and then has withdrawn both from her and from his family to his library (199; 2:19). When he is with his wife and family, he is guilty of “that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible” (200; 2:19). Furthermore, in failing to restrain his younger children, he is, as Elizabeth warns, compromising “our [family’s] importance, our respectability in the world. . . . Oh! my dear father, can you suppose it possible that they [Kitty and Lydia] will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not be often involved in the disgrace?” (195; 2:18).

Of all the characters in the novel, Elizabeth’s older sister, Jane, seems most identified with anxieties about harshly judging the self and others. Her principal trait is her reluctance to be critical of anyone. She is always ready to excuse and defend, or plead extenuating circumstances for whatever wrongs are done her by Mr. Bingley, his sister Caroline or Darcy. Jane would, for example, defend Charlotte’s marriage to Collins, or argue that Darcy and Wickham have somehow simply misunderstood one another or been misinterpreted to one another. To some extent, her reluctance to judge is a tonic to Elizabeth’s defensive rush to judgment, and some of the things the less critical Jane says turn out to be largely true. Yet Austen suggests that Jane’s “steady sense and sweetness of temper” (202; 2:19) are also to be understood as what we would now describe as a reaction formation against critical feelings and even anger directed against her own self and others. These critical ideas and feelings, in other words, are replaced in her conscious awareness by their opposites—feelings of placidity and general benevolence. Jane’s anger is a bit difficult to discern since she is “shut down,” not capable of expressing it. If readers are not given much of an interior view of Jane’s emotional life, we are, however, provided with a

rather full portrait of the psychological dynamics at work within her family. Elizabeth's shame about and anger at both her parents are tangible, and it seems reasonable to suppose that some of these feelings are present in Jane, too, precisely because she has gone to the opposite extreme in her refusal to think ill of anyone.

Certainly in Jane's tendency toward depression, which emerges in the second volume of the novel, after she has apparently been dropped by Bingley, there is evidence that all is not well with Jane, that her "sweetness of temper" comes at a price. If Elizabeth occasionally gives way to a psychosomatic headache (159; 2:10), Jane seems to suffer longer-lasting "periods of dejection" (131; 2:4). When Elizabeth scans once more "all the letters which Jane had written to her since her being in Kent . . . in all, and in almost every line of each, there was a want of that cheerfulness which had been used to characterize her style. . . . Elizabeth noticed every sentence conveying the idea of uneasiness, with an attention which it had hardly received on the first perusal" (160; 2:11). "Jane had not written in spirits," Elizabeth decides (155; 2:10); "Jane was not happy" (192, 2:17). Jane is convinced that Bingley's failure to call on her in London can be explained only by his indifference to her, whereas Elizabeth more accurately suspects a conspiracy to keep Bingley away. Suspicions and critical feelings about others are in Jane's psyche, then, turned against the self. No one is unworthy except herself.

In fact, Jane seems to cope by attempting to suppress all kinds of uncomfortable affect, whether strongly negative or strongly positive—like her affection for Bingley. As Elizabeth sees it, "Jane's feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and . . . there was a constant complacency in her air and manner, not often united with great sensibility" (177; 2:13). As a result, Darcy has a hard time discerning that Jane really is in love with Bingley, and we are similarly forced to deduce how sternly Jane judges herself. In both cases, however, the evidence is in the text. There is a restrained, depressive quality about Jane Bennet, an unmistakable sense of deficiency and diminished self-esteem. If a cer-

tain amount of self-restraint and humility are virtues for Jane Austen, she is also quite capable of demonstrating how these tendencies may be so pronounced as to become dysfunctional.

Of all the characters in the novel, however, Darcy represents perhaps the most interesting example of Austen's anatomy of shame—precisely because there seems to be an ambivalence on her part about the “pride” with which he is associated. If Elizabeth is the exemplar of the “prejudice” in the novel's title—by reason of the way she forms too readily and on insufficient information a judgment against Darcy and in favor of Wickham—Darcy is the exemplar of “pride.” Of course, Austen characteristically complicates her thematic by showing that Elizabeth's prejudice arises from her wounded pride, and that Darcy is at various times associated with something very like prejudice. Yet the question the novel repeatedly poses is whether or not, given his immense fortune, grand estate and distinguished family, Darcy's pride—manifested particularly in his stiff and stand-offish manners—can be justified. Is there such a thing as “proper” pride, or is all pride to be seen as a kind of defense against shame or anxiety about shame?

For the first half of the novel, Elizabeth's criticism of Darcy's hauteur dominates, and Elizabeth appears to win her debates with the defenders of Darcy's pride—Charlotte Lucas, Mary Bennet, and Darcy himself. Elizabeth's antagonists repeatedly try to distinguish vanity from pride. Darcy “has a *right* to be proud,” Charlotte thinks (18; 1:5); and bookish Mary Bennet, “who piqued herself upon the solidity of her reflections,” as Austen puts it in a wry revelation of Mary's own vanity, offers this distinction: “Vanity and pride are different things, though the words are often used synonymously. A person may be proud without being vain. Pride relates more to our opinion of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us” (19; 1:5). Thus Austen very early in the novel gives to two characters least likely to be identified as her spokespersons a certain grain of truth; a potentially strong defense of an appropriate pride is placed in weak hands.

Can there be a sense of dignity and strength that is not riddled through with anxiety about shame, anxiety about the adequacy of the self? Can there be a pride which one has “a right” to feel?

The answer to these questions shifts gradually in Darcy’s favor toward the center of the novel, particularly after he has a chance to defend himself and his behavior at length in his letter to Elizabeth; and the beginning of the third book, when Elizabeth and the Gardiners visit Darcy’s home, Pemberley, tips the balance in Darcy’s favor, when his housekeeper and Mrs. Gardiner weigh in on his side. As Mrs. Gardiner says, “There is something a little stately in him to be sure . . . but it is confined to his air, and is not unbecoming. I can now say with the housekeeper that though some people may call him proud, *I* have seen nothing of it” (215; 3:1). By the end of the novel, Elizabeth is able to declare flatly, “He has no improper pride”; those who, like her father, think him “a proud, unpleasant sort of man” simply “do not know what he really is” (316; 3:17).

This issue is complicated again, however, by Darcy’s own, ashamed condemnation of his pride, which he describes as a defensive walling off of himself from others, something which cannot be justified on the grounds of either his personal character or his elevated social status:

My behaviour to you at the time had merited the severest reproof. It was unpardonable. I cannot think of it without abhorrence. . . .

I have been a selfish being all my life in practice, though not in principle. As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. . . . I was spoiled by my parents . . . allowed, encouraged, almost taught to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, to *wish* at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared with my own. . . . You [Elizabeth] taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you I was properly humbled. (308, 310; 3:16)

It is clear that Darcy could truly believe in his own distinction (and that of his family) only if he could “think meanly” of everyone else. Indeed, when one looks again at his original slighting of Elizabeth as “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*” (12; 1:3), or of his response to Mrs. Bennet’s chatter—“The expression of his face changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity” (87; 1:18)—it is difficult not to give Darcy’s self-criticism as much weight as other characters’ later justifications of his behavior. They offer a defense in terms of behavior proper to one of his social rank; he offers a criticism based on knowledge of his own history and motivations. One assessment is social, the other psychological. Each has a kind of validity, and Austen never entirely settles the matter. Yet by opening up the issue to psychological investigation in this way, Austen raises the possibility that the less attractive components of Darcy’s “pride”—his tendency to look upon others with contempt—derive from a potentially fragile image of self and family. These tendencies constitute what the psychologist Gershen Kaufman describes as a “defending script” to insulate the self against shame (101). Fond as she is of subtle definitions, Austen would find interesting Kaufman’s attempt to differentiate between a desirable pride which affirms the self’s accomplishments and personal qualities, and a more suspect version of pride, contempt, which elevates the self above others (224-25). Yet Austen would probably be skeptical about how readily this distinction can be maintained in practice. After all, her novel is not only about the vicissitudes of pride and shame, but also about their complicated relationship to one another.

By the end of the novel, Elizabeth has done a complete turnabout and now regards Darcy’s behavior as entirely appropriate to one of his situation. This enables her to identify with his social rank and escape the shame of being associated with her own family. Of course, Elizabeth’s marriage speaks to more than this; it represents the solution of a very complex human equation, for Elizabeth and Darcy are a suitable match in a number of ways. They like one another, each has a devel-

oped intellect, their temperaments are complementary, and their union is neither “imprudent” (as Elizabeth’s with Wickham would have been) nor “mercenary” (like Wickham’s pursuit of Miss King). The marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy represents, in other words, the working out of Austen’s thematic concerns about what constitutes a good marriage.

Yet it is also true that there is “upward mobility” in Elizabeth’s marriage, and surely this improvement in her status will serve to minimize her anxieties about shame, her vulnerability to being disgraced by her family. To some extent, she will now be able to shut herself off from them. Lydia and Wickham will receive financial help, but neither Lydia nor her mother will be frequent guests at Pemberley. From Elizabeth’s point of view, Darcy, social status and pride, now assimilated to herself, are very useful. In his study of the dynamics of shame, Leon Wurmser argues that love—as much as contempt, ridicule, envy, numbness and boredom—can be a screen affect for shame: “The one who loves wants to undo a basic disparity [a sense of deprivation or need] in himself and acquire in the fusion with the partner what he is lacking inside” (200). In this sense, Elizabeth is able to overcome her shame through her love and through her identification with Darcy.

On the one hand, Austen sees the painfulness of her young heroine’s struggle with feelings of shame. Even when that shame is transformed defensively (reactively) into aggressive wit or anger, or into a kind of deadening repression of affect (as is at least partly the case with Charlotte Lucas and Jane), it is necessarily deforming. Shame may be associated with feelings of low self-esteem which become overwhelming, verging on depression. Jane Bennet is, as we have seen, depressed for much of the central part of the book, and Elizabeth, too, suffers self-hate and something very like depressive episodes after she receives Darcy’s explanatory letter and again after Lydia runs off with Wickham.

On the other hand, Austen herself seems very much caught up in feelings of shame and acts of shaming. As a comic author and a satirist,

she is concerned with ridiculing the ridiculous. Marvin Mudrick's well-known *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* is only one of many studies to focus on this crucial aspect of Austen's narrative technique—the way she takes a hard-headed, satiric look at all kinds of pretense, especially self-delusion, and engages in understated, implicit kinds of exposure. The author of these novels herself, then, exposes and shames. She does this, as Wayne Booth points out, not so much by having her narrator point and mock, as by coercing the reader in subtle ways to adopt her critical point of view toward her characters. Readers frequently express amazement at how they have been persuaded to see the action of the novel from Austen's point of view, how they have been seduced into sharing her values—values which they may not hold at all in real life—concerning the importance of class-consciousness, what constitutes a suitable marriage, the importance of rational control and emotional restraint, etc. As Bernard Paris has demonstrated, there is a connection between Austen's personal style and her writing style; in both she is a perfectionist (182-91). Attuned to the power relations between people in social life, and fascinated by the efforts of one person to dominate another, she is concerned to be in control of every word in her text, so as not to be found wanting. Her motto might be: "They are ridiculous, not I." For Austen as for Elizabeth Bennet, aggression is turned outward, away from the self. Yet, as one of the debates between Darcy and Elizabeth suggests, Austen is also aware that there are certain dangers in a consistently satiric stance toward life:

"Mr. Darcy is not to be laughed at," cried Elizabeth. "That would be an uncommon advantage, and uncommon I hope it will continue, for it would be a great loss to *me* to have many such acquaintance. I dearly love a laugh."

"Miss Bingley," said he, "has given me credit for more than can be. The wisest and best of men, nay, the wisest and best of their actions, may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke."

"Certainly," replied Elizabeth—"there are such people, but I hope I am

not one of *them*. I hope I never ridicule what is wise and good. Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies *do* divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can.—But these, I suppose, are precisely what you are without.”

“Perhaps that is not possible for any one. But it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule.” (50; 1:11)

Elizabeth adopts the pose of the traditional satirist: I ridicule the ridiculous as a corrective measure, hoping to shape a better, more rational world. Yet Darcy knows that this attitude may be carried too far, that even the good may be turned into the ridiculous by an aggressively self-protective wit. Thus at the conclusion of this debate he suggests that Elizabeth’s “natural defect . . . is wilfully to misunderstand” everybody (51; 1:11), to appropriate whatever anyone says in the service of her wit.

One way of putting Austen’s own dilemma in this respect is to note that although she presents herself finally as a rationalist, committed to a corrective satiric vision, she is psychologically astute enough to know that the process of deciding what is “real,” “true” and “rational” may have its unconscious and defensive determinants. Psychoanalyst Pinchas Noy links creativity with psychological insight in a way that Austen approaches intuitively, but also stops short of fully endorsing: “The main feature common to the process of creativity and the phenomenon of insight in psychoanalysis is the ability to transcend the rigid, reality-oriented frame of the intellect and transform it into a flexible apparatus suitable for dealing with the self in its needs, its defenses, and its striving for expression and contact with objects” (qtd. in Wurmser 284). On a rational level, Austen seems to think that the “reality-oriented frame of the intellect”—for her, reason and will—ought to dominate. Intuitively, however, she recognizes the power of an affect like shame and the role it might play in forming and shaping what an individual perceives as rational and correct.

In this context, the historical climate in which Austen composed her “novel of manners” becomes especially significant: *Pride and Prejudice* was written at the end of the Enlightenment—when the socially enforced religious sanctions used in earlier periods to keep personal behavior in check were being replaced by more secular, internalized, social sanctions. This is one reason why “manners,” behavior that conforms to social norms, is such an important issue in the Austen world. Lewis argues that shame is, to some extent at least, a post-Enlightenment means of social control in a secular society: “An ethical system based on the premise that human nature is evil or aggressive [e.g., a system based on a premise of original sin] will emphasize guilt as its major control, whereas an ethical system that includes human sociability as a ‘given’ will also emphasize the shame (in one’s own eyes) of losing the love of the ‘other’” (“Shame” 3-4). If Calvin requires guilt, Rousseau must have shame for his social order.

Lewis, moreover, sees shame as a particular problem for women in Western society, since “our sexist and intellectual heritage contains an explicit devaluation of women and an implicit, insoluble demand that they accept their inferior place without shame” (“Shame” 4). While men are encouraged to be aggressive and dominating, women are raised to seek the approval of others (Lewis, *Sex* 203-19). Certainly this is the situation of the female characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. Their vulnerable place in the social order is underlined and maintained by their shame. Conversely, male characters like Darcy and Collins develop exaggerated forms of “pride” to express and maintain their social power and control. The characterization of Darcy is especially relevant in this respect, since here Austen also raises the question of whether this sort of pride can ever be anything but defensive and brittle in such a culture.

Accordingly, it is not surprising that the role of shame in cultural formation has drawn the attention of anthropologists and historians as well as psychologists. In their 1953 study, Gerhart Piers and Milton B. Singer provided an overview of the anthropological attempts to distin-

guish “shame cultures” from “guilt cultures.” More recently, in a study entitled *Southern Honor*, the historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown points to the development of an ideal of personal honor, reinforced by episodes of shame and humiliation, as an essential element in the creation of the ideology and culture of the Old South.

Nor are we, at the close of the twentieth century, so remote from the shame culture that Austen and these other students of culture describe, for as Donald Nathanson notes: “The more I have studied shame and applied the results of this study to my work with patients, the more I am convinced that the overwhelming majority of our population lives in a state of chronic shame. This shame is either perceived as a sense of inadequacy relative to the ego ideal or denied and inverted as false pride” (191). As examples of “false pride” today Nathanson points to the pursuit of wealth and power, identification with sports teams, and the like—all in the interest of defending against “our (denied) fragility” (204). He might also have pointed to Cold War versions of American “patriotism,” to the continuing tendency of the U.S. to resort to military intervention to work its will in the world, and to its recurrent need to proclaim its superiority, whether on the playing fields or in the international arena.

Shame and its “defending scripts” seem to play an important role in the academy as well. Academics tend to fall into two groups: those with narcissistic, grandiose images concerning the importance of their work and those who are convinced that they can never be good enough, that they are “impostors” who will be found out and perhaps driven from the academy. In their classic study of this “impostor syndrome,” Pauline R. Clance and Suzanne A. Imes have analyzed the tendency of gifted professional women in particular to believe that they are really *not* bright and capable, that they have merely fooled anyone who thinks they are. Nor is the phenomenon limited to the female sex or to any specific professions. In society at large, the alternatives frequently seem to be a choice between, in Nathanson’s words, “a sense of inadequacy relative to the ego ideal” and “false pride” (204).

The fact that shame and the defenses against it play such an important role in our own lives and culture thus suggests both how little things have changed and how much we have to learn from Jane Austen's exploration of these feelings nearly two centuries ago. Reading *Pride and Prejudice* in conjunction with modern discussions of the psychology of shame can help us better to understand not only Austen's novels but also some very important psychosocial forces that inform modern Western culture.

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Notes

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1. All quotations from *Pride and Prejudice* are taken from the Signet New American Library edition. Since many modern editions of this novel are available, in my parenthetical citations I have provided not only page numbers but also, following the semicolon, book and chapter numbers.

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